

Washington DC- Rep. Rush Holt sent the following letter to Secretary B.J. Penn, the current manager of installations for the Department of the Navy. He also submitted these comments in response to the draft Environmental Impact Study (EIS) that the Department of the Navy released at the end of 2008. The Navy released the EIS in regard to its recent decision to open approximately 300 housing units to the public in 2010. Holt has voiced concern about the plan adversely affecting the residents of the local towns.

January 23, 2009

The Honorable BJ Penn Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Installations and Environment) 100  
0 Navy Pentagon

Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Penn:

I am writing to submit my public comments on the Environmental Impact Study recently released by your office in regards to the Laurelwood Housing Complex at Naval Weapons Station Earle and more broadly to share my concerns about the status of this project.

Repeatedly over the last year, my constituents have voiced their concerns over security, schools, infrastructure, and the environment with respect to the Navy's plan for the housing complex. Although the Navy's plan to open several hundred housing units to the public is ostensibly designed to save the nation's taxpayers' money, if implemented it would have the opposite effect.

First, the existing Navy plan would keep these homes on federal land, thus depriving local and county governments of the tax revenue necessary to pay for crucial first responder services, utilities, and the schooling of local families.

Currently in my district, most notably in Tinton Falls, the Monmouth Regional School District educates several dozen military children from Earle and nearby Fort Monmouth. With the impending closure of Fort Monmouth, this school district is making contingency plans for the future and will continue to be concerned about the need to educate hundreds of civilian children that the Colts Neck school district still does not accept. Well within state law, the Colts Neck School District is not required to educate any children from Earle although the housing is within Colts Neck boundaries. It is my understanding that this will lead to a legal battle, probably costing the affected towns millions of dollars in taxpayer funds.

Within the next year, the New Jersey Department of Transportation, along with the county and local governments, will be required to assist the Navy in building an access road across wetlands to the housing complex. Again, this will cost the townships to assist in the construction of these roads, police the territory and/or legally fight the construction of the project.

While these issues are of great importance, a perceived lack of security for the housing complex is the paramount concern of the citizens who contact me about this issue. Constituents of the 12<sup>th</sup> District and nearby Colts Neck feel that the decision to open this housing to civilians without security clearances or continued monitoring could put the base at risk. Many cite the local terrorist plot against Fort Dix as an example of the kind of threat they fear. I ask the department to reconsider its decision on the housing complex and to work with me to find an equitable resolution to this issue. I ask that you meet with me in Washington to discuss this in more detail

I appreciate your willingness to continue the dialogue on this important issue, and I look forward to hearing your reply.

Sincerely,

Rush Holt

U.S. Representative (NJ-12)